

The 21st Century New Muslim Generation Converts in Britain and Germany

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Abstract

The dissertation focuses on the conversion experiences and individual processes of twenty-four native British Muslim converts and fifty-two native German Muslim converts, based on personal interviews and completed questionnaires between 2008 and 2010. It analyses the occurring similarities and differences among British and German Muslim converts, and puts them into relation to basic Islamic requirements of the individual, and in the context of their respective social settings. Accordingly, the primary focus is placed on the changing behavioural norms in the individual process of religious conversion concerning family and mixed-gender relations and the converts' attitudes towards particularly often sensitive and controversial topics.

My empirical research on this phenomenon was guided by many research questions, such as: What has provoked the participants to convert to Islam, and what impact and influence does their conversion have on their (former and primarily) non-Muslim environment? Do Muslim converts tend to distance themselves from their former lifestyles and change their social behavioural patterns, and are the objectives and purposes that they see themselves having in the given society directed to them being: bridge-builders or isolators?

The topic of conversion to Islam, particularly within Western non-Muslim societies is a growing research phenomenon. At the same time, there has only been little contribution to the literature that deals with comparative analyses of Muslim converts in different countries. This dissertation is based on the conversion research methods by Wohlrarb-Sahr (1999) and Zebiri (2008), and further concentrates on the acute challenges and personal understandings of Muslim converts regarding cultural, religious, and moral changes, changes in belief and adoption of religious practices as well as social relations. Dissatisfaction with the former faith or given social norms, the appeal of the Muslim tenets, the search for identity and the desire to have a sense of belonging included the participants' motivation for conversion. Taking the former into consideration enabled the result of providing a personal, lively yet rational insight into the lives of British and German Muslim converts.

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